CLAIMS:

1. A method of acquiring and playing digital content comprising:

    acquiring a physical electronic key containing a key code from a key provider;

    acquiring locked digital content from a content provider, the digital content

5   being marked with an unlock code associated with the key code; and

    entering the locked digital content into a playing device that reads the key

    code and determines whether the key code is associated with the

    unlock code, the device being enabled to unlock and play the digital

    content if the key code is associated with the unlock code.

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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of acquiring the physical electronic

    key includes providing the key provider with user identification information for use

    by the key provider in establishing a user account, the user account including the user
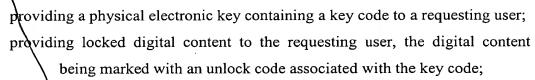
    identification information and the key code.

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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of acquiring the locked digital content

    includes providing the content provider with the key code for use by the content

    provider in validating the key code prior to providing the locked digital content.

20 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the locked digital content is locked by

    encryption and unlocked by decryption.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of acquiring the physical electronic

    key includes accessing a first web site of the key provider and requesting the physical

25 electronic key via the first web site, and wherein the step of acquiring the locked

    digital content includes accessing a second web site of the content provider and

    requesting the digital content via the second web site.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the physical electronic key is acquired at no

30 charge, and wherein the digital content is purchased.

7. A method of managing digital rights comprising:

providing a physical electronic key containing a key code to a requesting user;

providing locked digital content to the requesting user, the digital content
being marked with an unlock code associated with the key code;

receiving the locked digital content in a playing device that reads the key code

5 and determines whether the key code is associated with the unlock
code; and

enabling the playing device to unlock and play the digital content if the key
code is associated with the unlock code.

10   8.   The method of claim 7, further including establishing a user account including user identification information and the key code for the requesting user prior to the step of providing the physical electronic key.

  9.   The method of claim 7, further including obtaining and validating the key code
15 for the requesting user prior to the step of providing the locked digital content.

  10.   The method of claim 7, further including administering a first web site for receiving a request for the physical electronic key from the requesting user, and administering a second web site for receiving a request for the locked digital content
20 from the requesting user.

  11.   The method of claim 7, wherein the locked digital content is locked by encryption and unlocked by decryption.

25   12.   The method of claim 7, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing device include respective wireless transceivers for communicating the key code from the key to the playing device.

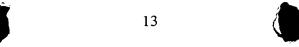 13.   A method of managing digital rights, comprising:
30   providing a physical electronic key containing a key code to a requesting user;

applying an unlock code to locked digital content acquired by the user; and

enabling a playing device receiving the digital content to unlock and play the
digital content if the device reads the key code from the physical

electronic key and determines that the key code is associated with the unlock code.
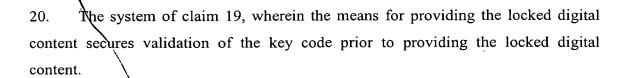
14. The method of claim 13, further including establishing a user account
5 including user identification information and the key code for the requesting user prior to the step of providing the physical electronic key.

15. The method of claim 13, further including obtaining and validating the key code for the requesting user prior to the step of applying the unlock code to the locked
10 digital content.

16. The method of claim 3, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing device include respective wireless transceivers for communicating the key code from the key to the playing device.
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17. A digital rights management system, comprising:
a physical electronic key containing a key code and provided to a requesting user;
means for providing locked digital content to the requesting user, the digital
20 content being marked with an unlock code associated with the key code; and
a playing device for receiving the locked digital content, receiving the key code, and determining whether the key code is associated with the unlock code, the playing device being enabled to unlock and play the
25 digital content if the key code is associated with the unlock code.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing device include means for communicating the key code to the playing device.

30 19. The system of claim 17, wherein the means for providing the locked digital content to the requesting user includes a web site on the Internet.

20.   The system of claim 19, wherein the means for providing the locked digital content secures validation of the key code prior to providing the locked digital content.

5   21.   The system of claim 17, further including means for providing the physical electronic key, and establishing a user account including user identification information and the key code for the requesting user prior to providing the key.

22.   The system of claim 21, wherein the means for providing the physical
10   electronic key includes a web site on the Internet.

23.   A digital rights management system, comprising:

    a physical electronic key containing a key code;

    locked digital content marked with an unlock code associated with the key
15   code; and

    a playing device for receiving the locked digital content, receiving the key
        code, and determining whether the key code is associated with the
        unlock code, the playing device being enabled to unlock and play the
        digital content if the key code is associated with the unlock code.

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24.   The system of claim 23, wherein the digital content is locked by encryption and unlocked by decryption.

25.   The system of claim 23, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing
25   device include means for communicating the key code to the playing device.

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